

Discovery Summary – 1956 Topps Jackie Robinson Gray-Back Print Artifact

Overview:

Recent analysis of multiple 1956 Topps Jackie Robinson gray-back exemplars (“Jackie 1” and “Jackie 2”) has revealed a consistent, previously undocumented red-ink print artifact located on the upper-right reverse margin of the card. This artifact exhibits characteristics of a plate-state registration witness rather than post-production damage or random printing defect.

Observed Characteristics:

- Color: matches red ink used in the cartoon block of the card back.
- Orientation: vertical dash aligned parallel to the right card edge.
- Placement: consistent across multiple copies at the same relative position.
- Exclusivity: observed only on Jackie Robinson cards; not observed on contemporaneous Sauer, Sievers, or Freese gray-back cards from the same acquisition batch.
- Sheet Independence: appears on cards originating from different sheets, implying plate-level rather than sheet-level origin.
- Run Constrained: currently only observed on gray-back (early Chicago print run) examples.

Interpretation:

The artifact aligns most closely with a micro registration witness used during alignment of the Jackie back cartoon block during multi-pass lithographic production. Its presence inside the final trim boundary suggests that the witness mark was originally positioned outside the intended card boundary but was brought inside due to trim tolerance or conservative cut margins typical of 1950s Topps production.

Role of (DP) Marking:

Jackie Robinson’s 1956 Topps card is known to be “Double-Printed (DP),” meaning it occupied two positions on the printing sheet. A DP configuration supports propagation of a plate-state artifact across multiple sheets and explains why the artifact appears on multiple exemplars while remaining exclusive to Jackie Robinson.

Significance:

This artifact provides new evidence regarding:

- back block layout for 1956 Topps printing
- Jackie-specific plate-state variations
- gray-back Chicago-run production topology
- early-run exemplar grouping
- provenance coherence for the Kaufman Collection

Conclusion:

This discovery represents a previously undocumented Jackie-specific plate-state phenomenon with potential relevance for historians, archivists, and auction catalogers studying mid-century Topps manufacturing. Further exemplar testing is recommended to determine persistence across DP positions and to evaluate whether the artifact disappears in white-back (Duryea-run) cards.